Preparing for the Assembly

XVII World Assembly
CVX - CLC

A gift for the Church and for the world

Buenos Aires 2018
Table of Contents

3   Editorial Foreword: Reflecting on a Gift to Be Shared:  
    Dorothy M. Zambito

5   President’s Corner: Ady Viera

5   Introducing Our Delegates to the World Assembly

6   Reconciliation and Community: EA Fr. John Lan Tran, S.J.

8   CLC, a Gift for the Church and the World:  
    Pat Carter Anderson

11  Summary for the U.S. Representatives to the World  
    Assembly: Members of the Pittsburgh PA Cluster

13  Computer-based Communities: Paula Burgan

14  The Gift of CLC: Marie Seeger

15  Disponibilité and the Catholic Church: Tim Rouse

16  Gratitude for CLC, a Prophetic Way of Life:  
    Mary Ann Cassidy

17  Overview of S.E.E.D. 2018: Bethany Vu

17  Reflections from Young S.E.E.D. Leaders:  
    Thanh-Tu Nguyen, Michael Do and Thienson Pham

20  The Creation Mystic: Thomas Merton’s Invitation to Know  
    Living Things: Carol Gonzalez

22  Litany of Graces in Our CLC History: Ann Marie Brennan

24  Calendar

24  Next Issue: Fruits of the World Assembly

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Editorial Foreword

Reflecting on a Gift to Be Shared

As the time draws closer for the Seventeenth World Assembly of CVX - CLC, each of us members is called to be part of the preparation for this historic event to be held in Buenos Aires this summer. “A gift for the Church and for the world” is the theme for our gathering. As always, we try to send our delegates with the knowledge and spirit of our current realities as lived out in CLC-USA. Sharing these with those who represent us is our way of being present. Consider it as a homecoming celebration in which we share glimpses of what has happened since our last get together as well as our hopes, dreams and challenges for the future.

During the last few years, we have reviewed our graced history, first as Sodality/ Marian Congregation, and more recently as Christian Life Community. In that remembrance, we identified gifts received: people who have been models of living CLC as a vocation; Ignatian spirituality, especially fed by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius; a strong sense of community experienced when we meet and when we are supported and encouraged by each other; collaboration in mission, especially as we embrace DSSE (discern, send, support, evaluate). The gifts of CLC are many, both personal and communal. The question we are asked to consider is how CLC has been shared or will be shared with the Church and the world. In this time of Easter, are we as excited and energetic as the disciples of Jesus after the Resurrection? Do we feel and look to the Holy Spirit to move us forward with joy to spread the Good News through the gift of CLC?

Projects 169 asks us to go deeper in our reflections of our CLC Charism as expressed in spirituality, community and mission. These “must constitute a lively, mutually reinforcing circle, whose integrated power is perceptibly expressed in the daily life of each member, each community and the whole Body.” We are reminded that as CLC members, we need to know and continue to study our history and our documents which are “valued as a treasure of wisdom and inspiration.”

Our intentions and efforts in sharing the gift of CLC to the Church and world are given a boost, a genuine support, through the spirituality and actions of our beloved Pope Francis. He personifies joy, mercy, compassion, care for the environment and the ways of Jesus in his outreach to those on the margins, the peripheries. He reinforces our growth in Ignatian spirituality, for example, in his encouragement to the whole Church to use discernment in all areas of ministry. Projects 169 suggests four of Pope Francis’ texts as as sources of inspiration and guidance in our assembly preparations: Evangelii Gaudium, Laudato Si’, Amoris Laetitia and the Preparatory Document for the 2018 Synod of Bishops. Consider how these writings will help us “follow Jesus Christ more closely and work with Him for the building of the Kingdom” (GP4) by bearing witness, working for justice and living a simple life style.

It is not too late to share your current reality and your hopes and dreams for the future of CLC as our delegates further prepare for Buenos Aires. Be in touch with Ady Viera, Father John Lan Tran, Ed Plocha, Frank Vuong, Ann Marie Brennan, or Carol Gonzalez.

Within this issue:

President Ady Viera reminds us of several points as we prepare for the Seventeenth World Assembly of CVX/CLC:

1. Be ever more generous through the gift of joy that CLC has been for us.
2. Embrace different peoples while keeping the Exercises central to our identity.
3. Depart from our comfort zone and work on the peripheries.
4. Discern how our Charism can help us reach beyond our communities as faithful laity in the Church.

Our delegates to the World Assembly are introduced to you. Be in touch with them.

From our Ecclesial Assistant, Fr. John Lan Tran, S.J., we have a reflection, “Reconciliation and Community.” He points out that reconciliation is foundational for community. Out of love, God restores a broken world. We must in our brokenness mend relationships, restore
trust and, day to day, grow in holiness and nearness to God.

“CLC, a Gift for the Church and the World” is Pat Carter Anderson’s offering. Pat writes of how the Spirit is creating paradigm shifts reflected in our current reality. Incarnational Spirituality is the shift on which she focuses. Pat then explores the ripple effects of this paradigm shift: the Cosmic Body of Christ; Integral Ecology; Culture of Encounter; Social Justice, etc. She stresses the importance of discerning communities for support and courage in the engagement to build the Kin-dom.

Several members of the Pittsburgh PA Cluster collaborated on the “Summary for the U.S. Representatives to the World Assembly: Clarities Emerging from Our Discussion.” This submission is a comprehensive response to Projects 168’s recommendation to evaluate our Charism of spirituality, community and mission. Each of the pillars is presented with listings of characteristics, sources of consolation and desolation and future directions.

“Computer-based Communities” by Paula Burgan is an example of a creative way to keep the gift of CLC alive and operable for members whose communities have disbanded or for other reasons are not available. Perhaps you or someone you know can establish a similar community.

Treasuring the gift of CLC is demonstrated in Marie Seeger’s “The Gift of CLC.” Marie’s move from New York to Virginia prompted her search for a new parish and her desire to share her gift of CLC. Read on about a gift she is receiving in return.

Long time CLC member and leader, Tim Rouse, shares a current reality/concern in “Disponibilité and the Catholic Church.” Disponibilité, Tim explains, means availability and willingness to serve and the ability to discern where and how. He faults Church leaders for being quiet or actively opposed to recent movements like Time’s Up, #MeToo and March for Our Lives. Tim believes, in the true spirit of CLC, that there is “the need to act and to act now.”

In “Gratitude for CLC, a Prophetic Way of Life,” MaryAnn Cassidy tells of the gifts of CLC, e.g. the Spiritual Exercises, the graces of community and the call to mission. These and other gifts helped transform MaryAnn in her prayer life, her experience of community and in the way she views and does mission.

Bethany Vu gives an “Overview of S.E.E.D. 2018.” She shares the progress to date and future programs.

Following are three Reflections from young S.E.E.D. leaders.

Reflection One: Thanh-Tu Nguyen shares about the 2018 S.E.E.D. Source Midwest Program. She recognizes God’s call to serve in this ministry. So many of her graces come from others serving in S.E.E.D. who reflect God’s love and presence to her and others.

Reflection Two: Michael Do tells of his initial uncertainty about becoming a S.E.E.D. leader. His interactions with other leaders helped him overcome his fears and helped him grasp the truth that by serving others he is serving God.

Reflection Three: Thienson Pham describes in detail the fears and uncertainties he experienced before and after the S.E.E.D. Source formation weekend. The love of God expressed in team members helped him face the challenges ahead making them “a gateway of grace.”

Those of us who have had contact with Carol Gonzalez know of her passion for the care of the earth and sacredness within it. In “The Creative Mystic: Thomas Merton’s Invitation to Know Living Things,” she testifies to the importance of Merton’s writing in light of the many people who deny and destroy his “sacramental vision of the world” by their actions and lack of concern.

As part of Metro New York CLC’s celebration of World CLC Day, Ann Marie Brennan prepared a lovely prayer service. Included in this issue is her “Litany of Graces in Our CLC History.” Perhaps you can include it in your own prayer for the assembly.

Let us all join together in prayer to the Holy Spirit and our Mother Mary for all those who will gather as CVX/CLC in Buenos Aires this summer. May they be supported, comforted and challenged to strive to do all for the greater glory of God through their vocation in Christian Life Community.

In gratitude to our Risen Lord,
Dorothy M. Zambito

IN MEMORIAM

Virginia C. De Castro, mother of Lourdes De Castro, St. Aedan CLC, Metro NY, January 14, 2018

Bernadette Viray, sister of Rosabella Velo and sister-in-law of Luis Velo, San Lorenzo CLC, Metro NY, March 9, 2018

Thomas Macaluso, brother of Peter Macaluso, North New Jersey CLC, Metro NY, March 15, 2018

Marie O’Donnell Garcia, member of N.Y. Professional Sodality, sister of Marianne Cummins, North New Jersey CLC, Metro NY, March 30, 2018
This is an exciting and joyful year for CLC. The World Assembly is to be held in July in Argentina, and Projects 169 calls us to be even more generous through the gift of joy that CLC has been for us in the last fifty years.

CLC-USA has received abundant graces during this time, growing to embrace a variety of peoples while keeping the *Spiritual Exercises* as central to our identity. Both Projects 169 and GP 5 state that they are really “the specific source and the characteristic instrument in our spirituality.” The Exercises have enabled us to live in the spirit of Vatican II and to grow in the creativity that is a main component of Ignatian spirituality.

As we journey toward this World Assembly, Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, makes us aware and challenges us to depart from our comfort zones to work on the periphery. This periphery will vary from country to country and even within the various regions and cultural groups of CLC-USA. It will require all our dedication to make Our Lord present in love and service.

We are looking forward to praying on the theme for the World Assembly in preparation for our coming together as one community. “Caring for our gift, offering it more generously in joy,” will encourage us to reflect further on the spirit of joy that is the gift of CLC. It will help us discern how our commitment to spirituality, community and mission can extend beyond our own communities to increased participation as faithful laity in the Church and in CLC.

**Introducing Our Delegates to the World Assembly**

Holy Spirit, as we send forth our delegates to represent us at the World CLC Assembly, we implore you to support, protect, inspire and empower them in their deliberations on behalf of our world community. Amen
God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18b)

As a retreat director, I have the privilege of listening to many stories from retreatants. In general, many people come to retreats to deal with urgent issues in their lives, ranging from a change of career to the loss of a loved one. Lately, one of the themes that has emerged from these stories is loneliness. For many retreatants, especially older ones, recent changes in society have led to the loss of connections, resulting in more isolation and loneliness. While I cannot fully understand this phenomenon, I can sense a yearning for authentic human connections, for community.

One way that I have tried to approach this issue is by reflecting on reconciliation. In the New Testament, St. Paul writes about reconciliation in 2 Cor 5. Here, he uses the term reconciliation (katallage), which is rooted in the Greek verb allage, to change. With the added prefix kata, it becomes exchange, to refer to the exchanging of Christ’s death for our sins. I suspect this is the origin of the term “holy exchange” in some of the prayers in the Mass. In this sense, 2 Cor 5:18b, cited above, can be rendered with added words for clarity as: God has restored our relationship with Him by exchanging our sins with Christ’s death, and giving us the task of restoring others’ relationships with God.

In this instance reconciliation has to do with how God, out of love, restores our broken world through the death of Jesus. At the personal level, like a ship that has lost its direction and can no longer be guided to its original destination, humanity often becomes alienated from ourselves and from God.

This self-alienation reflects on our human brokenness. Msgr. Francis Mannion uses the term “spiritual ruins” to describe the reality of human life.

The ruins of our lives are the terrible and unfixable mistakes we have made, the wrongs we have never been able to right. They are the relationships, once valuable and cherished, that have broken down, never to be rebuilt in this life. They are the irreversible illnesses and ravages of age that bring pain, feebleness, depressions and a growing sense of mortality. They are the lost arts and skills, abilities and agilities that once we thrived on, but now are fading. They are the people we love, once joyful and happy, who have fallen into pessimism, unhappiness and despair. Our ruins are the painful imprints made upon us because of the terrible things that have happened to us. They are the loss of family, friends and companions through age and death. They are the unrepairable things that have happened to nearly every person, every family, every community. (Cited from “A Spirituality of Ruins” by Msgr. Francis Mannion, published on www.praytellblog.com, Oct. 28, 2013)

Facing our brokenness, reconciliation means mending relationships, restoring hope, coming to terms with our mistakes, accepting our limitations, and above all, trusting that God will raise us in the resurrection as he has done for Christ.

It is good to note that St. Paul understands reconciliation not as a return to the state of original perfection, but rather the restoration of a lost trust. In other words, salvation is not a once and for all event, but rather a process of transformation. Our faith in Christ re-orient our life toward God, while our hope keeps us moving forward and our love helps us to fulfill our obligations to God and others. In this process, we do not change drastically from being sinners to saints, as much as we wish that were the case, but we grow slowly each day in holiness, becoming closer and closer to God. St. Paul speaks of this transformation by contrasting life and death every day we die to the self, letting go of sinful ways, to live for God, by acting more and more
like Christ. The way to do this, however, is not to work over but through our weaknesses. Thus, we have the famous Pauline sayings, “When I am weak, I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10), or “Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more.” (Rom 5:20)

I believe reconciliation is the foundation for community and mission. The basic mission for all Christians is to continue the work of Christ. To use the words of St. Paul, we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18) Within our family, our workplace, our CLC groups, etc., each of us must be reconciled to God and to one another. In this way, the ministry of reconciliation goes hand in hand with building community, for reconciliation brings us back to God as well as to one another.

Allow me to reflect on one more experience. A few weeks ago, I went to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to give a retreat to the confirmation class of the Vietnamese parish there. During the retreat, I had a chance to work with some members of the local Dong Hanh group, who were actually running the retreat. As we talked about the past, I realized that the Dong Hanh group in Tulsa was founded in the 1980’s and has been active ever since. What has helped them survive and grow all these years? Perhaps there are many factors, but I suspect one of the main factors has to do with the continuing efforts by some members to be transformed and to grow in their CLC charism. I suspect this to be the case in other places. We must continue to carry out our mission and build community. Otherwise, we will die.

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This is a graced moment in the lived history of Christian Life Community. Projects 168 names three contextual realities of our times that are converging to accompany us into the future: CLC’s 50th anniversary focusing on our communal graced history; Pope Francis’ call for renewal of the Church that is more joyful, compassionate and responsive to the needs of those on the margins including the Earth; and Pope Francis’ call for a renewed appreciation for the role of the laity as those who are on the front lines of apostolic activity.

“We desire greater depth and integration in the living out of our CLC charism in the world today.” This is the grace we are asking for during this preparation time and it calls us to reexamine our CLC way of life in the context of today’s realities. It challenges us to step out of our comfort zones and to examine our assumptions and beliefs about these realities.

I would invite us to take a broader look at how the Spirit is working throughout the world creating paradigm shifts in how we view reality on many levels. Here are very brief summaries of some of these.

**Incarnational Spirituality**

Since the time of Constantine much of Church teaching and practice moved from a spirituality of incarnation which emphasizes God’s loving presence in all of creation to one of redemption which emphasizes Jesus’ death as a ransom from sin. But just as Galileo’s discovery that the earth revolves around the sun began a shift in the theology of his times, the scientific discoveries of our age are also influencing our image and experience of God. From the vastness of the cosmos to the sight of our blue planet suspended in space to the discovery of an energy that flows through all created matter at the most elementary levels, we are rediscovering an understanding of God that has been carried through the ages by mystics, Franciscan spirituality and indigenous peoples. They all have that felt-knowledge (sentir) that all of creation is an incarnation of the Divine who is Love, that the entire cosmos is the Body of Christ created and sustained in Love, and, in the words of Richard Rohr, *Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity; Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God.* Our image of God shifts from that of One demanding atonement to a loving Father seeking at-one-ment.

In the bookends of the Exercises, the Principle and Foundation and the Contemplation on Divine Love, Ignatius exudes this incarnational experience and the expression, *Finding God in All Things,* certainly echoes this. If we view the Exercises through the lens of incarnational spirituality, new meanings and challenges appear.

Pope Francis, with his blend of Ignatian and Franciscan spiritualties, incorporates this incarnational vision. He is a perfect spiritual leader for our times as we transition to this new paradigm. This paradigm shift to incarnational spirituality has caused ripples across our collective awareness, creating new insights and concepts that were either non-existent fifty years ago or just being developed. Here are some of these interconnected ripples and a brief summary of each.

**The Cosmic Body of Christ:** The work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., is considered seminal in developing the awareness that the Pauline description of the Body of Christ is not simply a mystical or ecclesial concept, but a cosmic one. The Christ is God’s active power inside of the physical world. All is connected and all is one. (Genesis 1, John 1, Acts 17:28, Col 1:15-20)
If all of created matter is part of the Cosmic Body of Christ, then all matter must be treated as sacred. The distinction between sacred and profane is blurred, and we, like Ignatius, encounter God in all things. We don’t make judgments about rich and poor, sick and healthy, honor and dishonor, long life or short [5]* but allow ourselves to experience God’s presence in all things and situations. This would include those people and situations that we find difficult. Jesus said that we must love our enemy. This challenges us to move to a non-dual world view; one that can hold both sides of a polarity and recognize God’s presence in each.

Our sense of mission also shifts from discerning my mission with myself as the starting point to discerning mission as a participant in the Body of the Christ. “What have you done for Christ; what are you doing for Christ; what ought you do for Christ?” [53]

Integral Ecology: In Laudato Si’, Pope Francis speaks of integral ecology and uses examples from both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament to show how life is grounded in our relationship with God, our neighbors and the created world. Justice in the biblical sense means being in right relationship. When we break these relationships, we sin. Ignatius’ Contemplation on Divine Love [230-237] shows how this awareness of our connectedness to God through creation is to be lived out, in gratitude for the gift. Pope Francis goes further by connecting care of the natural world with justice for the poorest and most vulnerable people. Only by radically reshaping our relationships with God, our neighbors and with the natural world, he says, can we hope to tackle the threats facing our planet today.

Culture of Encounter: If all of creation is an expression of the divine and all are participants in the Body of Christ, then it would seem to follow that we need to develop relationships with all peoples and all of creation. Pope Francis calls for a culture of encounter where we make a conscious effort to develop right relationships with those we consider different from us, who are on the margins of society or who practice different faiths. In our polarized society today, this is a very timely challenge. Again, Jesus models this for us in his encounters with the marginalized of his time: a Samaritan woman, lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes and with Pharisees whom he knew were plotting his death.

Social Justice: While the expression “social justice” is familiar to us today, it wasn’t until the 1960s that it was broadly used. Social justice refers to right relationships within the institutions and governing powers of a society. It looks at the systemic causes of poverty and other causes of suffering in the world and how we participate in them, often unaware of the cultural conditioning that is at the root of the evil. Even without the expression social justice, Ignatius recognized powers in the world that influence us and lead us to sin. In the First Week, he invites us to look at the sin of the angels and Adam and Eve to help us become aware of evil tendencies that exist outside of ourselves before he invites us to examine our own lives. [50-51] Jesus often spoke out against the systemic injustice of his times. (Mark 11:14-16, Matthew 23)

Social Analysis and Theological Reflection: These are two steps in making more gospel-based decisions about our responses to the needs of our times. Social analysis asks the journalist’s questions: who, what, why, when, where and how? The point of social analysis is to ask those same questions about whatever we are involved in, whether it be something in the local news or a matter of national and international public policy. Our first task is to apply our senses, understood broadly, to the reality around us.

Theological reflection is the second part of the answer to what’s happening. It builds upon analysis and asks: what are the values here? How do I and my faith community judge what is graced or sinful? What is freeing or enslaving people? What promotes or destroys human dignity and covenantal community? We do theological reflection to better understand our part in bringing forth the reign of God in history. It is less about making judgments than gazing at the situation with discerning love. For if all creation is part of the Body of Christ then all is sacred, fallen and redeemable.

In the Two Standards, Ignatius gives us an early model for theological reflection by inviting us to use our imaginations, to use our senses to gain a felt-knowledge of the different value systems of Lucifer and how he goes about his work, and the values of Jesus and how he goes about his work. [136] Jesus’ beatitudes give us the attitudes with which to approach this task. (Matthew 5)

Restorative Justice: If all is redeemable, then there must be a way to help make that happen. Restorative justice emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all those involved: the offender, the victims and their families, the community as well as legal systems. It recognizes that offenders harm victims, communities and themselves. Success is measured by how much harm is repaired or prevented. It aims at involving all parties in the decision of how best to address and repair the harm done. Ideally this is accomplished when offenders and victims encounter each other and listen to each others’ stories. It aims to reintegrate them into their communities.
Jesus’ gaze of discerning love changed the lives of those he encountered, especially the marginalized mentioned above. He not only healed them personally, but his healing allowed them to become functioning members of the community. They were no longer on the margins.

**Creative Nonviolent Resistance:** Often the word “nonviolence” is interpreted as pacifism or even passivity. But much of what has been already discussed in this article finds its embodiment in creative nonviolent resistance. If we believe that all exists in Christ, that all is sacred, flawed and redeemable, that we are called to build the Kin-dom** of God, then we need to practice nonviolence at all times, not just to resist systemic evil. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., are modern examples of this approach to challenge and resist unjust systems, but they take their lead from Jesus. Nonviolence means striving to live the Gospel message of love and justice to the point of sacrifice rather than fighting and becoming like those you are opposing. It means being willing to absorb hate and return it with love. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 5:11 and 43-48. He also modeled it in his own passion and death and ultimate resurrection. Ignatius speaks of this when he speaks of deliberately choosing wrongs, rejections and poverty for the building of the Kin-dom. [98] [167]

**Transformational Suffering:** It is important to remember that suffering is for the transformation of those individuals and systems that are unjust. It is not victimhood, but comes from a stance of freedom. It is a choice to endure the consequences of living the Gospel faithfully. This is the choice Jesus made in Gethsemane. We are to hold, carry and transform tension so as not to give it back in kind, because what we don’t transform we will retransmit. We can’t redeem what we don’t love. This is what Jesus called us to when He said, “Do this in memory of me.” Perhaps a better description would be transformational love.

**Importance of a discerning community**

Living this incarnational spirituality is not for the faint-hearted. It is not a journey easily taken alone. It often leads to burnout, disappointment and even anger without the support of a discerning community.

Fred Kammer, S.J., in his book, Salted with Fire: Spirituality for the Faithjustice Journey, shares how a group of social ministers over the period of two years wrestled with the relationship of individual, communal and systemic light and darkness. They discovered through much discussion, prayer and discernment, that all three of these elements are interconnected with each other. Communities that don’t include all three aspects in their faith life are not fully living the Gospel message. The individual needs to be honestly engaged in his/her interiority or spirituality. The community must be one of trust, yet challenging and discerning. And the systemic realities of the world need to be part of that discernment. He named this the Triadic Insight.

More and more people are being engaged in social justice issues as they react to the systemic injustice of our times. While we live in a chaotic time, it is also a time of great opportunity, a call to engage more fully in the building of the Kin-dom. Pope Francis has called for the Church to be a field hospital responding to the needs of the marginalized, but he has also called us to be agents of change of those systems that cause people to be poor and marginalized. So where do those responding to this invitation go for the necessary spiritual grounding and community?

CLC seems to be uniquely gifted to respond to this need. Our own graced history and the development of tools like Discern, Send, Support, Evaluate (DSSE) enable us to respond to this need of our times. “How many loaves have you? … Go and see.” (Mark 6:38)

I would invite our communities to consider what this insight might imply for CLC locally and nationally and at the world level. How does this differ from the insights in our own General Principles? How are the paradigm shifts mentioned above reflected in our community life on the local, regional and national levels? Is there some aspect of this that we are called to grow into more deeply?

Resources for exploring the topics mentioned in this article can be found at a web site that Mac Johnson and I have been imagining for several months, engagedmystic.org. A link to this site can be found on the CLC-USA web-site at https://clc-usa.org/social-justice-resources-websites/engagedmystic. This site is a response to a need Mac felt to help sustain those coming out of the JustFaith experience by helping them develop sustaining communities. It is equally a resource for those communities wanting to deepen their apostolic life.

“We desire greater depth and integration in the living out of our CLC charism in the world today.” May the Spirit guide us as we open our hearts and minds to this grace.

* Numbers in brackets indicate paragraphs in the Spiritual Exercises.

** The use of Kin-dom instead of Kingdom is being used by several authors including Richard Rohr to show the movement from a hierarchical world view to a more inclusive, incarnational one.
The Pittsburgh PA cluster of CLC-USA gathered for a celebration of World CLC Day on March 24, 2018 from 12:30 to 5:00 PM. Twenty-four members from seven communities in the Greater Pittsburgh area attended. In terms of CLC experience, participants ranged from a founding member of CLC Pittsburgh in 1987, to a woman attending her first-ever CLC meeting. We had time for socializing and sharing delicious snacks, a check-in icebreaker, group prayer, a video clip of our World CLC President, small group sharing and large-group processing. The day concluded with a prayer service in which we joyfully accepted the temporary commitments of four members to the CLC way of life. Overall, there was a sense of savoring our shared identity in Christ through CLC. There was also a willingness to face our challenges in living that identity with depth, profound integration and joy.

Our desired grace for the day was: greater depth, integration and joy in the living out of our CLC charism. In line with the suggestions of Projects 169, our cluster used this occasion to clarify the nature of our CLC charism and to consider how we are living it out. For each of the pillars that comprise our charism (spirituality, community and mission), a small group reflected on the following questions:

1. What characterizes the particular pillar the group is discussing?

2. How has this particular pillar brought you joy (consolation)? Has it ever been an occasion of desolation? If so, how?

3. Moving into the future, how do you see yourself and your community experiencing this particular pillar and extending it to others?

Each small group wrote the highlights of their discussion on colorful index cards and attached them to one of three brown paper “pillars” that were taped to the wall. As the groups shared their insights, it quickly became apparent that the pillars of spirituality, community and mission are inextricably linked – folks considering different pillars often mentioned the same points. Clarities that emerged include:

**Spirituality**

Characteristics:
- Based on the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*
- Focused on finding God in all things; an integration of prayer, daily life, mission
- Daily use of the *Examen*
- Focused on discernment both as individuals and as community
- Expectation of regular personal prayer
- Focused on preferential option for the poor and living a simple lifestyle

Sources of joy/consolation:
- A deep sense of God’s unconditional love
- Faith-sharing our struggles, joys and insights with each other
- The graced experience of discerning God’s will as individuals and communities

Source of desolation:
- The challenge to go beyond our comfort zone (though this can also turn into consolation)

Future directions:
- Exploring together who are the poor (not just economically), how we can be in solidarity, and making more people aware of the preferential option for the poor
- Exploring what it means to live a simple lifestyle with a sense of care for the world

**Community**

Characteristics:
- Depth of sharing, deepening relationships
- Safety, a sense of family
- Risk of vulnerability and woundedness
- Promotion of trust and healing
- Nurture of accountability and support
- Depth of spiritual wisdom multiplied and shared
- Differences coalescing to bring clarity
- Steadfastness and continuity, despite changes in membership
- Ignatian spirituality fostering discernment
- Differences accommodated gracefully, without polarization
- Networking leading to increased awareness of social justice issues and opportunities

Sources of joy/consolation:
- Deep sharing and relationships
• Bringing qualities of CLC into other community experiences
• Experiencing consolation even from losses when there is mutual openness, vulnerability, forgiveness

Sources of desolation:
• When members leave without closure
• When there is unresolved conflict
• When the larger international CLC is not seen as easily accessible
• When a group is ecumenical and cannot share Eucharist

Future directions:
• Work to become more diverse in our CLC groups (in terms of race, class, age, denomination, gender, etc.).
• Share qualities of CLC with other kinds of groups.
• Share “best practices” for how to handle a member leaving abruptly or without closure.

Mission:
Characteristics:
• Founded on reflection and discernment
• Supported by DSSE
• “When one of us is there (e.g. involved in some mission), we all are there.”
• Witnessing to and working for justice
• Coming alongside where the Spirit is leading
• Called to the Magis

Sources of joy/consolation:
• Solidarity with sisters and brothers in Haiti, Puerto Rico, Kenya (St.Al’s) and other areas of mission
• Availability for service
• Companionship others in the Spiritual Exercises
• Responding to the World CLC frontier of integral ecology through inner conversion
• Inner conversion leading to enthusiastic mission

Sources of desolation:
• A world that does not acknowledge the need for justice
• The enormity of the needs

Future directions:
• Note the energized way the young people are leading March for Our Lives!
• Build on our networking capacity and deepen our social awareness, as we renew and ground ourselves in “Our Common Mission” and in graced documents found in www.cvx-clc.net/l-en/documents/OCM.doc

After the small groups shared their ideas with the large group, we had a few minutes of silent reflection and went into a second round. First we considered, “What struck you about how this cluster community is living out the three pillars?”

Comments included:
• There is excitement to be newly involved in CLC and feel so welcomed.
• The grace of vulnerability helped us to see our wounds as gifts rather than only as losses.
• Out of the messiness comes clarity when a CLC engages a topic together. Common clarities emerge from communal sharing.
• There is a sense of birthing a ‘community’ of communities (as seven local communities experience a sense of interconnectedness as a CLC cluster).
• CLC seems to lead to deeper, richer sharing than some other faith-based groups.
• There is a longing in our membership to go deeper and to form a more profound integration (lived charism of spirituality, community and mission). We desire the Magis.
• Several people referenced the quote by Teilhard de Chardin, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” CLC shares this conviction.
• Although the name of Jesus was not mentioned today, it’s understood that he is our reason for being here. This is meant as an observation, not a judgment.
• What exactly is our CLC Charism? It seems to come down to the integrated pillars of Ignatian spirituality, community and mission, lived out as laypeople in all the domains of our lives. Another expressed it: CLC is a world-wide, lay, Ignatian way of life lived out in community on mission. We also want to lift up the clarities of GPs 4-9 when seeking to define the CLC Charism.

Next we considered, “Given any needs we’ve identified for fuller living of our charism, what are our hopes and plans for the future?”

Comments included:
• We want to share our gift more generously by building more diversity in our communities.
• We want to live and act so as to attract people to the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatian spirituality and CLC.
• We can invite people to explore CLC if they have not prayed the Spiritual Exercises but seem to have potential and/or interest for doing so.
• We want to practice a nurturing accountability as CLC.
• We want to collaborate with other like-minded communities in building a more just society.

Our purpose is to be Christ in the world; this is why we come together. We want to get out there and do it! To live into our oneness!

At the end of a grace-filled afternoon, we went our separate ways to bring Christ more fully into our world. Though fallible as spiritual beings and aware of our shortcomings, still we seek to integrate the CLC charism in all aspects of our human experience.
Living in Alaska has some advantages, the biggest of which is the delightful summer climate. I endure winter by looking forward to a glorious summer. But living in Alaska also has some definite drawbacks. Before moving here we lived in Seattle. Parishes there were large enough so that no matter what program was offered, a decent number of parishioners usually attended. Not so here. The total population of the state is about 300,000 and parishes are small.

When Fr. Larry Gooley and Sr. Sylvia Swanke came to Anchorage to tell us about CLC in 1992, attendance at the information nights was good and sixteen people expressed interest. However, over the next two years membership declined and declined. The last members held on for twenty plus years, but the group finally disbanded. By then I was National Secretary and felt fully committed to CLC. So what was I to do? I managed to find two others in Anchorage and one in Idaho who were interested. With Rick Kunkle’s leadership we formed Diaspora CLC. However, since Rick was the heart and soul of the group, when he died the group also died.

Back to square one. When my term as National Secretary ended, there were fifty-one members on the database without groups. I thought back to those names and decided, a true inspiration, to contact Pat Carter Anderson. Many of you know her as a Past President. I knew she was living in Iowa far from any groups, so I asked her if she would be interested in forming a computer-based community. She replied that she already had one. Would I like to join them? You bet I would! So after consulting the other members of the group, she welcomed me to Discipleship CLC. There are currently six members: Pat Carter in Iowa; Pat Hottinger, S.H., in Illinois; Mary Ann Wachtel, SFCC, and Judy Szot in Missouri; Deb Flynn in Washington; and myself. We meet twice a month on Mondays during the day. Whoever is the facilitator for the meeting generally chooses the material. Right now we are beginning Pope Francis’ *On Hope*.

Computer-based communities are much like regular CLC groups. They require consistency in prayer and attendance and genuine caring about the others in the group. It’s sometimes difficult to find a time when everyone can be present, but without the need for travel time it’s somewhat easier. On the other hand it seems to me more difficult to really get to know the others without the benefit of direct contact. I hope I’ll have a chance to meet the other Discipleship members at the next Assembly. Meetings are a little shorter without the social hour. We use the program ZOOM which has a small cost attached and have used OOVOO which is free. Both have audio and video components and also allow members to phone in when they are away from home.

If you are a CLC member looking for a group, I urge you to give a computer-based community a try. All it takes is six or eight people, including one member who can guide the group. Your regional chair is a good resource for names.
I live in Virginia now - so far away from the Bronx where I grew up and where many of my CLC memories are focused…

I was invited to join CLC in the 80s (who can remember exactly when?) by Fr. Dan Fitzpatrick, S.J. I was taking classes at the New York Archdiocesan Center for Spiritual Development and ran into him there one day. He had been my brother’s high school teacher at Xavier and already an old friend! He invited me to a meeting at Irene and Roy Messina’s house. What was it about? Just come, he said.

It was a very busy time in my life – working full time and raising six children. I began to attend meetings, thinking this would never “fit” into my busy life. Somehow, it fit. The years flew by, and CLC became an integral part of them. I was driving to meetings in Westchester and at Fordham, being part of my Westchester community and the larger Metro NY CLC world. I was getting to know wonderful people of faith and all the while being sustained by Ignatian prayer, retreats and powerful community experiences. But life moves on, and, in retirement, my husband and I have moved south.

I found myself searching for the kind of spiritual sustenance that I knew in CLC.

Eventually, I was drawn to a Jesuit parish in Richmond, Virginia. Sacred Heart is a thriving, life-giving community, where the faith nourished in Word and Sacrament is also lived out through the presence of Sacred Heart Center, an amazing place, always buzzing with activity. Here, the Spanish immigrant community has a thriving, nurturing, welcoming home.

I was introduced by their pastor, Fr. Shay Auerbach, S.J., to a small group of English speaking parishioners, already living out their faith in committed parish involvement: teaching English, working in sacramental and community programs, helping with immigration issues, liturgical service. You name it, they do it. Ignatian spirituality, seeing God in all things, being of service, living community are all alive and well. God is at work there. But they never heard of CLC.

For the past two years, I have had the privilege of meeting with them regularly, introducing them at first to some of the basics of CLC, and learning much from them about faith lived out in service. Using Fr. Gooley’s book, To Share in the Life of Christ, brought me back to the foundations of CLC spirituality. Praying with this generous group of people helped me remember why a community of faith is so important. This year, we have been joined by Fr. Don Ward, S.J., who is guiding us through the 19th Annotation retreat.

I am reminded every day of what a gift I have been given in CLC. My spirituality is nourished by this kind of environment, by growth in prayer and by the example of dynamic faith-filled people sharing their lives and struggles. I remember Fr. Dan always telling us that CLC is a gift we are given to be shared. In this sharing, I am being given still more.
One of the central themes of Christian Life Community is that of Disponibilité. This French word means availability and willingness to serve and able to discern where and how. During the past six months there have been almost more opportunities to serve than one can count. I would like to comment on five of them here:

- The Time's Up movement
- #MeToo
- The Women’s Marches
- March for Our Lives
- Banning single use plastics

In each of these cases, the Archdiocese of Omaha has either been silent or actively opposed. I’ve heard the reasons. They just strike me as either uninformed or consciously unwilling to deal with major issues in our world that effect many millions.

Church leaders have said Time’s Up, #MeToo and The Women’s Marches are led by those who favor LGBT, abortions, etc. Wrong. I’ve been in the marches which are incredibly inclusive. I know many women who have been victims of rape, discrimination or abuse. Some women have been directly abused by the Church. I wonder why the Church is not in the vanguard of movements such as these? Why are they not at least participating and adding the dimensions of right to life for all, urgent action on the environment and positive actions to reduce poverty rather than individual income taxes. Those would reflect the message of Christ far more than standing on the sidelines.

Many local Church leaders said March for Our Lives would interfere with regular school work, and participants would be penalized for taking fifteen minutes to protest. I know one high school where the students said the rosary. The rosary is always valuable to say, but this was a moment for public, not private, testimony. I wish the Church had sponsored busloads to go to Washington for the rally, just as they did for the right to life rally a few weeks earlier. Both rallies were about life. Is one murder better than the other?

And then there is a topic like single use plastic bags. There are dozens of topics like this one. Single use bags are damaging the environment worldwide. What will it take for the Church to act on the words of multiple Popes and take stands that will save our environment?

I could go on and on. Readers could add examples of their own. I have been a member of CLC since 1955. Over those many years I have seen the Church go through multiple metamorphoses. But as I look at it today, it feels as though the Church is less willing to act on the clear challenges facing us in the US than it ever has been. That of course puts even more responsibility on groups such as Christian Life Community to truly lead those who are Christian Catholics in tackling the difficult but critical challenges the Church refuses to recognize.

John Leunis (often cited as the founder of CLC) and his small group of laymen and Jesuits saw Disponibilité as key to CLC: to observe the challenges in the world and determine appropriate actions to respond to those challenges.

Whether as communities or as individuals, the need to act and to act now is perhaps more important than at any time in history.
Harvest / 16

Gratitude for CLC, a Prophetic Way of Life

By Mary Ann Cassidy

My focus for the invitation to pray with Projects 169 has been the three pillars of CLC: Spirituality, Community and Mission. I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on them and the influence of Pope Francis on these topics.

The experience of the Spiritual Exercises is one that has unfolded in my life as a Catholic Christian and a member of CLC. Knowing in my heart that I am unconditionally loved, even though I am a sinner, released a large roadblock to self-acceptance, and the beginning of a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. The weekend and eight-day retreats and many days of prayer, grounded me more deeply in that relationship and opened me to want to think and live like Jesus, however imperfectly. The roots of the CLC Charism are found in Ignatian prayer and being in touch with the passion of Jesus for the outcast, the sinner and all of humanity. How am I allowing the passionate love of Jesus for humankind to flow into my actions?

Community is a grace and a mystery. Vatican II brought into view the new paradigms for church. More than an institution, it is community and sacrament. The Spirit residing in that community is molding and transforming each person into Christ. As a local, national and global community, CLC has enhanced and broadened my experience of Church. Children, men and women of every culture are my community. I am enriched by the witness of the community that began and continues to support St. Aloysius School in Nairobi; the witness of the CLCers reaching out to their neighbors in San Juan, Puerto Rico after the devastating earthquake, Maria; the CLC members who lobby in the UN for the indigenous peoples whose land and livelihood are at risk in the Amazon; and for those NGO members who work on behalf of refugees and migrants.

In the General Principles, one reads that God identifies with the human race in all its humanity. (GP#1) Pope Francis supports this principle with his writing and his actions. He walks the talk. He has shown me that change and growth are needed in the Church and in myself. This dialogue between myself or the CLC member and God has the Spirit’s push so as not to get stuck in routine. With a little bit of creativity there will be “new life.” Pope Francis, in Joy of the Gospel (#43) writes “a missionary heart never closes itself off, or retreats into its own security…” His gentleness, love of people and genuineness has really impacted me and people all over the world. I know that as an aging woman, I have often retreated into security. Risk was not in my vocabulary. Many years ago, my family and I were asked to provide a home for a political refugee from Ethiopia. Sponsored by a religious community, he needed to experience the US culture. It was a wonderful experience for us as a family to learn about his culture and struggles and to help him find a footing in his new country. We grew into mutual appreciation of each other and formed a deep friendship. In his new exhortation, Gaudete et Exsultate, Francis tells us to see “the entirety of one’s life as mission…” Further, he writes, “always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life…” Having Temesgan in our family was what Jesus was asking at that time.

I am so grateful for GP #4 that stresses the care for creation, option for the poor and a simple lifestyle. With the publication of Laudato Si’, and ecology (one of the four areas for mission from the World Assembly in Lebanon 2013), I had an attitude adjustment. It is hard to believe that forty years ago Thomas Berry was speaking of the urgency of the environmental crisis. Sixteen years ago, Saint John Paul II called the destruction of the environment ‘ecological sin.’ I certainly wasn’t listening. Reading and praying with Laudato Si’ and adopting Care for our Common Home as Metro NY CLC’s common mission motivated me. These deepen my awareness of how I am contributing to the planet’s demise. It alerted me
to the effects of my habits on the poorest who are part of my community. Due to two hurricanes, clean water and energy were lost at home and on poor islands. Parts of Puerto Rico are still without power. Though my steps are small, I began writing letters to national leaders on the issue of climate change and became a nag to my adult children about their use of plastics and consumption of energy.

At the Metro NY Lenten Day of Prayer, Father Trevor Scott, S.J., CLC Ecclesial Assistant in Canada, reviewed Projects 169. He cautioned us about getting too comfortable in our communities, forgetting the Spirit who is always breathing new life. The writings of Pope Francis and his gentleness show me the compassion of Christ. As we move toward the World Assembly may we beg for the grace to live our vocation with that same compassion, generosity and fervor.

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**S.E.E.D. Overview**

*By Bethany Vu*

S.E.E.D. is a Dong Hanh CLC ministry that provides Ignatian spirituality retreats for children from 1st - 12th grade. The retreats are planned and executed by young adults who are practicing Ignatian spirituality in their everyday prayer life. In April, S.E.E.D. Ministry completed this year’s Source Formation and Training workshops. This is the third year that it has offered training for parents to become organizers who help plan the logistics of the retreat and support the leaders. Between the two workshops 27 new leaders and 14 new organizers were trained. 46 veteran leaders and 9 veteran organizers attended Source to deepen their formation and build community with the new members of the team. The addition of organizer training has allowed for stronger bonds and deeper understanding between young adult leaders and parent organizers when they work on S.E.E.D. in the summer. In other news, at the end of 2018 S.E.E.D. Summit III will be held. Delegates from each region will gather to discern the direction of the ministry for the next 3 years and will elect new national leadership.

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**S.E.E.D. REFLECTION #1**

*By Thanh-Tu Nguyen*

What a blessed weekend it was to be with the community, not just S.E.E.D. Source Midwest but the whole Dong Hanh CLC community in general. Every time I was asked to serve in this ministry, I always hesitated because of my lack of skills and the time commitment needed. I always responded with a Yes, knowing it was God who was calling me to serve, and I always left as a new person. Serving Source Midwest this year was no different. Over the whole weekend, I was showered with so much love and support from the community that I left with many graces. I learned much from the participants. Their openness to learn and serve in S.E.E.D. Ministry was a nice reminder of why I serve. God’s love was presented through my Source formation team as well. They are the living example of love-driven leadership. They were constantly checking in and always supporting our talks and activities. They taught me what it was like to be a server of the Lord. Beside the five of us, there was a team of more than 10 young adults who could not be there in person. I knew we
were in their prayers, and working with them has been a great honor. The graces God has given me were also shown through the organizers and the greater Dong Hanh community as well. The older adults in the local area shared their homes, hosted us for the weekend and prepared and brought all the delicious food for every meal. The Young Adult Catalyst group drove hours to show their support in presence and in prayer. I could go on and on about what they have done behind the scenes. Even though they didn’t even know our names or see our faces, their love and support made S.E.E.D. Source Midwest a blessed weekend. Although I had very little sleep in Houston, I left there with so much more energy physically, mentally and spiritually. I knew that it was God who was working miracles in me through the people I serve and the people that served me. In three short days, I grew as a S.E.E.D. leader and as an individual as well. S.E.E.D. Source Midwest was a life-changing experience for me.

Thanh-Tu Nguyen is currently a Math Education student in Colorado. Her passion is in serving youth, whether in teaching or leading retreats. She finds great pleasure in reading, listening to music and exploring the great outdoors.

S.E.E.D. Reflection #2

By Michael Do

Initially, I was very hesitant to join S.E.E.D. The main reason was that I wasn’t confident that my faith was strong enough for me to help others with theirs. So naturally when my mom and sister in a lovingly aggressive way tried to convince me to attend S.E.E.D. Source, I tried to steer the conversation somewhere else. However, in the end I did decide to attend and the only feelings I remember leading up to the weekend were that of nervousness and anxiety. I honestly didn’t know what to expect going in, because everyone I asked refused to tell me anything. It sounds weird, but in my head, I was going to be seated in a classroom over the weekend and be drilled on how to plan a retreat. My only expectation was that I was going to come out knowing how to somewhat plan a retreat. I learned quickly, that it was so much more than that. I ended up not just learning more about how S.E.E.D. Ministry operates as a whole, but also more about Ignatian spirituality and how I could incorporate my faith into my daily life. What resonated most with me was the interaction with all the leaders and hearing about why they wanted to serve. I heard many stories about past S.E.E.D.s, and about all the spiritual benefits one can gain through S.E.E.D. It finally clicked in my head that serving through S.E.E.D. could help my faith just as much as it could help those with whom I interact. The only way I could resolve my fear of not being able to make a positive spiritual impact on other retreatants was to just go in and give it my all anyway. My fears and insecurities about serving turned into excitement and anticipation. Attending S.E.E.D. Source completely changed my perspective about serving as a leader and has given me the encouragement to serve God by serving others.

Michael Do is from Garden Grove, California. He is a freshman attending Goldenwest. He hopes to major in Business Administration. Michael was a Seedling for 3 years before attending Source. He was introduced to it because his sister was a leader. His family is also connected to CLC as members of Suoi Thieng which is a family group in Dong Hanh CLC.

S.E.E.D. Reflection #3

By Thienson Pham

When Alex, one of the veteran Source members, called to invite me to be a part of the S.E.E.D. Source 2018 team, I really considered declining the invitation. Although a helper for S.E.E.D. Source 2017, I in no way felt qualified to be a part of the Core Team for this year. If anything, my experience last year made me realize just how much planning, praying and physical time it took to deliver such an important program for the entire ministry. On a deeper level, I didn’t feel my own personal faith formation was near that of the many Anh Chi on the Core Team with whom I would be serving. Even with Alex offering to be my one-on-one mentor during the entirety of S.E.E.D. Source, I still felt a strong urge to decline the invitation. I voiced these concerns to Alex and told him I would need time to pray about the invitation. He responded with, “Okay, see you in two weeks.” Two weeks later, I found myself on my first ZOOM call with the current Source Team.
This small experience was one of many similar experiences I had serving on the Source team this year. For most of my life my motivations, reactions and decisions have been made from a place of fear. I have a strong tendency to over-analyze and worry. Over the years I came to realize that the excessive need to plan and worry comes from a fear of failing and being found unworthy in the eyes of my teammates and God. I was worried about not knowing enough about the planning process. I was insecure regarding how to facilitate and help this year’s helpers plan the talks they needed to present. I was worried about tackling two personally difficult formation talks. Fear was an ever-present companion during the four months of planning.

Strangely, it was because of this fear that I was able to grow closer to my teammates and God. My teammates were a constant reminder of God’s ever-persistent love and support during this process. I would like to share a specific moment of the S.E.E.D. Source 2018 season.

I entered S.E.E.D. Source Norcal with a lot of trepidation. The week leading to Source weekend was one that felt very heavy in my heart because I felt utterly unprepared and worried. I started doubting myself and became fixated on any critique that the team had to offer on parts of the program for which I was responsible. I started to feel as if the team was disappointed in the work I contributed, and though I knew it wasn’t true, I felt it in my heart. Worst of all, I started feeling like God was frustrated by my constant worrying over the same things, and disappointed in my inability to trust Him.

However, it was during this time that I felt the most held by Him through my teammates. When I finally opened up about my fears to Alex the night before Source, he helped frame my fears in their proper perspective and shared his own experiences of worry and doubt. We ended up spending an additional hour on the phone catching up and checking in with each other. The actual weekend of Source Norcal was one giant affirmation of God’s love. Many times during the weekend, I felt myself being lifted by every single team member. Through panicking over not printing handouts for theme discernment, laughing at all the creative lengths attendees went through to win our mock-retreat activity, late-night evals and surprise messages from our team members not able to be with us, I was reminded of God’s love and presence in each of the members of the Source team.

The community atmosphere as a whole during Source Norcal is still something that I have trouble articulating. 1 Corinthians 12:12 states: “...all parts of the body, though many are one body, so also is Christ.” From the new to the experienced, from young adults to older adults young at heart, there was a strong sense of a uniting love made possible only through Christ that made this weekend one of the best. It was amazing to see people laughing, talking, sharing and journeying together as a part of one body, and throughout that weekend I couldn’t shake the strong sense of joy, unity and love that was present.

When faced with the love of the team and the love of the community, I couldn’t help but let go of my fears and reciprocate that love to the people around me. I did have the most challenges I’ve ever faced in my spiritual life during this time period, but each challenge became a gateway to grace and allowed me to dig deeper and root myself in love. S.E.E.D. is a place for me to constantly challenge myself to serve with greater love than fear, and this year I felt I truly learned what it meant to do that.

Thienson Pham is a 22-year-old college student studying to become a math teacher. He found CLC through serving in S.E.E.D. Ministry which he had done for three years. His spiritual journey is still pretty new, and he is still learning a lot about prayer and exploring his relationship with God. He is eager to do so to deepen his experience of community life in CLC. This is his first year serving as part of the Core Team that plans and delivers the S.E.E.D. Source Training and Formation weekend for the ministry.
The Creation Mystic: Thomas Merton’s Invitation to Know Living Things

By Carol Gonzalez

Be a Gardener. Dig a ditch. Toil and sweat. Turn the earth upside down. And seek the deepness. Water plants in time. Continue this labor and make noble and abundant fruits to spring. Take this food and drink, and carry it to God as your true worship.

Julian of Norwich, 14th c.

It’s been said that we’ll only save what we love, and Thomas Merton—like the medieval mystics before him—has helped generations of seekers to discover the sacred, living in loving communion with God, with the natural world and with one another. Defying categories, “Merton is like a city with twelve gates, any one of those gates you could pass through,” observes Jim Forest of the scope and breadth of issues that Merton addressed in a vast body of work: war, racism, workers’ rights, poverty, theology, contemplative spirituality, as well as nature as a manifestation of the divine. If Merton were alive today, it’s no stretch to imagine that he’d be as focused on climate change realities as he was on the existential nuclear threat of his Cold War era. At the heart of Merton’s ecological passion was the desire to be rooted in a place and to know “the vestige of God in [God’s] creatures”—that is, to know the reconciliation of all things in a place, to reveal the presence of God in creation. Merton sought to bring the whole of his being, his inner geography as a mystic, into reconciliation with the geography of the Kentucky landscape to which he had been called as a Trappist monk. Life in the monastery seeks to hold together two apparent opposites: a vocation to solitude and an interconnected community life of service to others.

This resonates with me as a farm girl who grew up with the earth, at play in creation. As a young adult, I discovered my mission or vocation in the context of an urban environment. Seeking the sacred as part of intentional Christian community, first in Buffalo, NY and in Manchester on Pittsburgh’s Northside, we bought an abandoned 1885 house. We offer hospitality in the Catholic Worker spirit and I found myself full circle engaged in communal urban farming as sacred work. The journey has included a rediscovering and valuing of ordinary day-to-day activities. We make choices around food and water, energy, transportation, investments and an engaged citizenship in a specific place. In these discerned choices we rediscover that, as Merton writes, “in the end, it’s the reality of personal relationships that saves everything.” Awakening our love of the earth, as contemplative activists, we’re invited to understand what the bishops prophetically taught us years ago. Merton’s writing echoes, “The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one.” Seeking to further our contemplative experience of the divine in Creation while also addressing the underlying causes of the ecological crisis we face today, Merton’s writings, like Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’, in our day, make it clear that “one of the greatest challenges of our time is inner conversion to a development that respects Creation.”

Reading Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring was seminal for Merton as he had long admired Carson’s devotion to science as an expression of our spiritual bond with nature. We observe in Merton’s correspondence with Carson his commending her on the moral courage of speaking inconvenient truth to power. Witness to Freedom: The Letters of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis, is a beautiful testament to how interconnected the deepest truths of existence are, how they transcend all boundaries to bring us into intimate contact with reality itself, and our responsibility to the web of life. Merton writes:

[Silent Spring] is perhaps much more timely even than you or I realize. Though you are treating just one aspect, and a rather detailed aspect, of our technological civilization, you are, perhaps without altogether realizing, contributing a most valuable and essential piece of evidence for the diagnosis of the ills of our civilization…. Your book makes it clear to me that there is a consistent pattern running through everything that we do,
To go out to walk silently in this wood—this is a more important and significant means to understanding, at the moment, than a lot of analysis and a lot of reporting on the things ‘of the spirit.’

-Merton, Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom

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through every aspect of our culture, our thought, our economy, our whole way of life…It is now the most vitally important thing for all of us, however we may be concerned with our society, to try to arrive at a clear, cogent statement of our ills, so that we may begin to correct them. Otherwise, our efforts will be directed to purely superficial symptoms only, and perhaps not even at things related directly to the illness. On the contrary, it seems that our remedies are instinctively those which aggravate the sickness: the remedies are expressions of the sickness itself. I would almost dare to say that the sickness is perhaps a very real and very dreadful hatred of life as such, of course subconscious, buried under our pitiful and superficial optimism about ourselves and our affluent society. But I think that the very thought processes of materialistic affluence (and here the same things are found in all the different economic systems that seek affluence for its own sake) are ultimately self-defeating. They contain so many built-in frustrations that they inevitably lead us to despair in the midst of “plenty” and “happiness” and the awful fruit of this despair is indiscriminate, irresponsible destructiveness, hatred of life, carried on in the name of life itself. In order to “survive” we instinctively destroy that on which our survival depends.

Merton’s own nature writings have been selectively gathered together in a comprehensive reader compiled by Kathleen Deignan, When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature. It contains chapters on seasons, the four elements, firmament (sky/sun/moon/planet/stars), creatures, festivals, presences and sanctuary. Drawing on nine volumes of Merton and ten of his books, this collection offers wonderful insights into his sacramental vision of the world. He invites us to a deeper attentiveness to our essential kinship with the whole cosmos—every meadow, bird, blade of grass, every person. Invited to listen with the ear of the heart to the wide-open secret of the natural world around us, Merton recognizes that “there is in all visible things an invisible fecundity…a hidden wholeness.” He experienced, and invites us to know, the power of nature to call us back to authenticity, to come home to our self, to the deepest nobility of our own nature. The Jesuit, Walter Burghardt, frames this as a “long loving look at the real,” becoming who we are. As Thomas Berry, Passionist priest and expert on ecology and world religions, writes in the Foreword of Deignan’s book, “Everywhere we find ourselves invaded by the world of the sacred. Such was the experience of Thomas Merton. Such is the wonder that he is communicating to us. An absence of a sense of the sacred is the basic flaw in many of our efforts at ecologically adjusting our human presence to the natural world…We will neither love nor save what we do not experience as sacred.”
Litany of Graces in Our CLC History

By Ann Marie Brennan

Response: Help us Lord, to go and see.

Right 1. For St. Ignatius and his companions who heard the call of the Holy Spirit, wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*, and committed their lives to love and to serve. (1540) R

Left 2. For the first Marian Congregations who gathered for prayer, faith sharing and apostolic works—to unite all dimensions of their lives. (1556) R

Right 3. For the Marian Congregations who persisted during the suppression of the Jesuits, under their respective Diocesan Bishops. (1773 – 1814) R

Left 4. For the Jesuits who made a special effort to revive the Marian Congregations as one of their works and opened the office of the Secretariat in Rome. (1922) R

Right 5. For the approval of the constitutions of the Marian Congregations, *Bis saeculari*, now called the Sodalities of Our Lady by Pope Pius XII. (1948) R

Left 6. For the inspiration of unity as the local chapters united as a World Federation. (Rome 1954) R

Right 7. For being moved by the Spirit of the Lord, influenced by Vatican II, inspired by the rediscovery of Ignatian sources, the Assembly approved a new *General Principles* and a new name: Christian Life Communities. (Rome 1967) R

Left 8. For the move toward lay leadership with Father Arrupe, where the role of the Jesuits shifted to one of assistance and inspiration. (1967) R

Right 9. For patience, prayer and accompaniment during times of struggle: in figuring out our identity, in ways of organizing, in communications, and in how best to work for justice and peace. For recognizing division as an opportunity for stronger unity. (Santo Domingo 1970) R

Left 10. For the discernment of social justice action, that of liberation for all – whether as CLC groups or as individuals, and for establishing CLC NGO status at the UN. (Augsberg 1973) R

Right 11. For the priority of favoring the poor both in life choices and in service. In returning to the *Spiritual Exercises*, both as inspiration, and as a practice lived personally, in our small groups, and to others in ministry. (Manila 1976) R

Left 12. For affirming the value of community, moving forward from the federation model to the acceptance and confirmation of the calling to become One World Community. (Providence 1982) R

Right 13. For the confirmation of the grace of our identity as rooted in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius: sent in Mission in union with Christ poor and humble and in imitation of Mary, (Loyola 1986) and approval of our revised *General Principles*. (Guadalajara 1990) R
Left 14. For the discovery of the intrinsic missionary dimension of CLC to be lived in our everyday lives. (Hong Kong 1994) R

Right 15. For the deepening sense of mission, especially in a common mission to bring the freeing power of Christ to our social reality, to let His grace illuminate all that needs transformation, in every aspect of our daily life. (Itaici 1998) R

Left 16. For receptivity to the call to become a Lay Ignatian Apostolic Body that shares responsibility for mission and practices the group method of DSSE—Discerning, Sending, Supporting, Evaluating. (Nairobi 2003) R

Right 17. For the desire to be present in the world as a prophetic community. (Fatima 2008) R

Left 18. For the community’s presence in four frontier areas of the world—ecology, poverty, family, youth—which call for the apostolic discernment of the whole community. (Lebanon 2013) R

Right 19. As we prepare for the upcoming world assembly in Buenos Aires, we pray for the desire to live with greater depth and integration our three pillars: spirituality, community and mission in our daily life. R

Left 20. For openness and awareness of this Kairos moment in the Church, led by Pope Francis, in courageously living the Gospel of Christ in our world today. May we use the gift of discernment for healing, liberation, and inspiration in our families, among our youth, for those most vulnerable, for those who hunger and thirst, and for all of creation in our common home. R

All: Come let us sing to the Lord: let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.

The Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his humble servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed, the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.
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World CLC Assembly—Buenos Aries, Argentina July 22-31, 2018

NCC In Person Meeting—Cleveland, Ohio, September 13-16, 2018

National Assembly—Pittsburgh, PA July 18-21, 2019

Fruits of the World Assembly